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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Sixty-second session

Summary record of the 53rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 20 September 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Bras Gomes

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Consideration of reports

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Sixth periodic report of Colombia (*continued*) (E/C.12/COL/6; E/C.12/COL/Q/6 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Colombia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. De Schutter** (Country Task Force), noting the State party's generally good record on access to health care, said that he would like to know what the Government was doing to remedy the disparities that existed between the poorest and the best-off quintiles of the population in the use of preventive care and between rural and urban areas in the quality of health services and technologies available. Given the poor ratio of health professionals, particularly doctors, to population, and the extremely low figures for some areas, he also wished to hear what was being done to improve that situation.

3. **Ms. Gaviria** (Colombia), replying to questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting, said that the Government had made great efforts to reduce the incidence of child labour, bringing it down from 9.1 per cent in 2015 to 7.8 per cent in 2016. Through a tripartite commission set up to address the subject, it was working with representatives of employers' organizations and trade unions to develop a national policy aimed at eradicating the problem. The Ministry of Labour had national and territorial mechanisms for identifying and recording cases. In the mining sector, programmes had been developed in cooperation with international organizations and civil society bodies to address the problem in the relevant parts of the country, with projects to raise awareness of children's rights among parents and school staff. Over 4,000 families and 12,000 children had benefited from such training.

4. **Mr. Dimaté Cárdenas** (Colombia) said that the Government was promoting social investment to reduce child labour, notably through projects to prevent illegal mining. Between 2010 and 2016, that work had led to the closure of over 6,000 illegal mines, the arrest of around 11,000 persons and the confiscation or destruction of more than 2,000 machines.

5. **Ms. Romero Cristancho** (Colombia) said that, under national legislation, children and adolescents who had been demobilized from armed groups in the country were regarded as victims and, in line with the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, benefited from the "Differential Life Path" programme described in the Government's replies to the list of issues (E/C.12/COL/Q/6/Add.1). The policy adopted in 2010 on preventing the use of children or adolescents by illegal armed groups was being revised in the light of current conditions.

6. **Ms. Londoño Soto** (Colombia) said that the Government's policy for combating violence against women addressed the problems faced by women in situations of conflict but also in other circumstances.

7. **Ms. Romero Cristancho** (Colombia) said that the National Policy on Gender Equality was intended to ensure that women were able to live their lives free of violence. The related road map was implemented through coordinated action by the government entities responsible for health, justice and the rights of victims; action could be initiated by any of the institutions involved and tailored to local needs. Sexual violence was subject to harsher penalties when it was committed in the context of armed conflict. Acid attacks were now defined as a separate offence in legislation. In 2008, more than 2,100 persons had been charged with offences related to sexual violence; the figure had risen to over 3,000 in 2017. In that period, more than 18,000 convictions had been handed down. A 24-hour helpline for victims of all types of violence had helped over 220,000 women in 2017; educational and information materials had been distributed and symbolic reparations had been obtained for female victims of sexual violence.

8. **Ms. Barrera Mariño** (Colombia) said that microcredit and other programmes had been set up to help rural women improve their lives and livelihoods and those of their families. Women represented 40 per cent of the beneficiaries of land restitutions; gender mainstreaming was also an important part of projects and training for both rural women and civil servants throughout the country.

9. **Mr. Moreno Gutiérrez** (Colombia) said that, in respect of civil registration, government efforts over more than a decade had focused on encouraging the registration of vulnerable groups, including the Afro-Colombian, indigenous, rural and displaced communities. The positive results could be seen from a survey conducted in 2013-2014, which showed that 96 per cent of displaced children were now registered.

10. **Ms. Bolívar Vargas** (Colombia) said that, as the health service covered around 90 per cent of the population, the Ministry of Health would be working with the National Civil Registry Office to encourage registration.

11. **Ms. Barrera Mariño** (Colombia) said that the peace agreement included a specific section on the need for compatibility between the national policies on small-scale farming and on large-scale agro-industrial production. The approach adopted should promote both types of agriculture in all parts of the country, including the priority regions identified in the agreement, through the extension of improved practices, better marketing and an emphasis on sustainability. While the Government recognized that both levels of production were important to the country, it sought to ensure that large-scale production was not given higher priority.

12. **Ms. Londoño Soto** (Colombia) said that, having experienced floods caused by climate-related phenomena in 2010 and 2011, Colombia was well aware of its vulnerability to the effects of climate change and was fully committed to cooperating with the international community in addressing that challenge. It aimed to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent by 2030 and had 23 regional climate change management plans that were being implemented in the country. Water was a particular issue; the institute responsible for water resources carried out regular surveys that made it possible to predict some risks and assist in the relevant planning at the national and local levels. An expert from Colombia was a member of the Global High-level Panel on Water and Peace, which was developing recommendations on smart water management to prevent water from becoming a source of conflict. In the Caribbean region, where 80 per cent of the population lived, only one fifth of the water came from the local area.

13. **Ms. Barrera Mariño** (Colombia) said that, pursuant to the Victims and Land Restitution Act of 2011, a land register had been set up to address land restitution and a commission had been established to examine the problem of abandoned land. Land rights had been restored to many vulnerable communities, such as indigenous, Palenquero and Raizal groups. Of the over 100,000 applications submitted by campesinos, over 60 per cent had been granted, 40 per cent of those through court rulings, and 7,000 families had benefited. The Act also provided for improved public services and socioeconomic conditions for the populations concerned. Restitution on ethnic grounds had given rise to 287 applications, 28 per cent from Afro-Colombian communities and 22 per cent from indigenous peoples; six judgments had benefited 3,000 persons, with 140,000 hectares of land returned as of August 2017. The provisions of the peace agreement encouraged the rapid processing of applications for land restitution, with a commensurate budget allocated to the courts, and judges had been given increased powers in adopting related decisions. Two registers had been set up, one to identify abandoned land for restitution and the other to identify persons in need of land.

14. **Ms. Bolívar Vargas** (Colombia) said that, faced with the dual problem of child malnutrition and obesity, Colombia had a dual strategy, which included components to address the needs of indigenous groups and the rural population. The Food Security Network programme currently covered half the country's territorial departments, focusing particularly on areas with indigenous populations. International cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund had led to the introduction of a comprehensive approach to the care of patients with malnutrition and national guidelines on nutrition for children under the age of 5, as well as human resource capacity development. Early detection was facilitated

by the epidemiological monitoring system implemented by the National Health Institute. The positive impact of those efforts was already reflected in reduced levels of malnutrition-related child mortality and morbidity in the Department of La Guajira. A strategy had also been introduced to combat child obesity, with a 10-year plan to promote breastfeeding and projects to reduce the consumption of salt and trans and saturated fats. The proposal to introduce a tax on sugary drinks had not been adopted by Congress, but the Government intended to continue its efforts in that direction.

15. **Ms. Londoño Soto** (Colombia) said that carbon tax rates were tied to the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by each type of fuel. The tax was projected to raise approximately US$ 230 million annually to fund the promotion of renewable sources of energy.

16. **Ms. Botero Hernández** (Colombia) said that the mechanisms introduced as part of the sectoral action plan to mitigate the effects of greenhouse gases were intended to maximize the rational use of resources, reduce production costs and improve air quality. Continued efforts were being made to identify new non-conventional sources of energy and to implement international energy efficiency standards in the industrial sector. Incentives were being offered to the private sector, including a more stable taxation structure, to encourage investment in new energy sources.

17. **Mr. Salazar Cuéllar** (Colombia) said that the income generated by the carbon tax would be used to fund environmental sustainability and sustainable rural development in areas that had been affected by the armed conflict. In particular, the money would be used to protect ecosystems and address environmental issues such as coastal erosion.

18. **Mr. Sadi** said that while the State party's climate change policies were laudable, he would be grateful for more specific information on programmes for moving towards solar and wind energy and for combating deforestation. He wished to learn whether the Government had any programmes to combat the use of insecticides and pesticides. More detailed information on prison conditions in the State party would be welcome.

19. **Mr. Windfuhr** (Country Task Force) said that he would appreciate the delegation's comments on how the Government intended to address the low rates of unionization and collective bargaining agreements, particularly in the private sector. It would be useful to receive more information on the precarious working conditions found in rural areas. He would also be interested to learn how the State proposed to protect civilian workers who were employed to clear coca crops and how workplace safety legislation applied to people working in the informal sector.

20. In the area of health care, it was unclear why the *tutela* procedure for protecting rights was used so frequently. He would appreciate the delegation's response to reports that privatization schemes had deprived poor people in rural areas of access to hospitals and medicines. Additional details on the comprehensive environmental health policy for 2017-2027, including how it would be implemented in the mining sector, would be welcome.

21. **The Chair** said that she would appreciate an overview and a brief analysis of the impact of the programmes in place to improve the social protection floor.

22. **Mr. Zerbini Ribeiro Leão** (Country Rapporteur) said that he wished to know how the State party guaranteed that minimum wage legislation was applied without direct or indirect discrimination against ethnic minorities, indigenous people or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons, in line with paragraphs 31 and 33 of the Committee's general comment No. 23 on the right to just and favourable conditions of work. In connection with the entrepreneurship strategy and rural employment programmes, he would welcome information on the outcome of the plans to establish partnerships between family allowance funds and other public or private parties for the operation of the programmes.

23. **Ms. Londoño Soto** (Colombia) said that her country's energy sector relied predominantly on hydroelectric power. While Colombia received a large amount of sunshine, the humid conditions in much of the country hindered the efficient use of solar energy. The authorities were striving to meet international standards on the use of insecticides as part of their preparations for Colombia to become a full member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The Ministry of Agriculture and

Rural Development and the Colombian Coffee Growers Federation provided ongoing training on the rational use of pesticides.

24. **Mr. Moreno Calderón** (Colombia), referring to the question on prison conditions in Colombia, said that the Government was working to reduce overcrowding in the penitentiary system by limiting the use of pretrial detention. New legislation to that effect was already showing results, with the percentage of the prison population being held in pretrial detention falling from 37 per cent in 2015 to 30 per cent in 2017.

25. **Ms. Londoño Soto** (Colombia) said that the reduction of a significant number of prison sentences handed down for offences committed before 16 March 2017 would also help to reduce overcrowding and would improve access to health care in the prison system.

26. **Ms. Caviria** (Colombia) said that the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Justice and Law were involved in a joint initiative to train prisoners in teleworking. The Ministry of Labour had developed programmes to help victims of the armed conflict return to the workforce. One such programme had provided training and job search support to 1,000 people, indirectly benefiting 24,000 victims in 11 municipalities. The Government had identified 170 municipalities as priorities for post-conflict support and had conducted training and outreach programmes for 1,869 people in 32 municipalities.

27. Progress had been made on collective bargaining agreements in both the public and the private sector. In 2014, only 182 such agreements had been recorded by the authorities; by 2016 that number had risen to 430. A special independent commission was in place to deal with workplace grievances and trade union issues. Between 2013 and 2017, more than 80 cases had been settled internally. A regional workshop had been held in Bogotá to share experiences and good practices with other countries.

28. While the Government was running a national campaign to promote unionization, collective bargaining processes were hindered by the sheer number of unions and the fact that the Constitutional Court had ruled that all unions had the right to negotiate with employers. The issue was currently being examined by the Standing Committee on the Coordination of Wages and Employment Policy.

29. Legislation was in place to protect workers from occupational hazards. People working in the informal sector and independent workers, such as taxi drivers, had access to any health-care services they might require as a result of accidents or injuries at work. Colombia had ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).

30. **Mr. Galvis Vargas** (Colombia) said that the Government was working to reduce economic barriers to access to health care. Vulnerable people received free health care, and Colombians had the lowest out-of-pocket health-care expenses in Latin America. Efforts were being made to bring services closer to people living in rural areas, who made up 25 per cent of the population. The aim of the Government's comprehensive health-care policy was to achieve the best possible health conditions for the population in terms of both health insurance coverage and the quality of the services available. Scholarships were awarded to fund training in areas where there was a shortage of qualified personnel, such as paediatrics. A pilot programme in the Department of Guainía, where 85 per cent of the inhabitants were indigenous, had increased access to health care from 20 per cent to 60 per cent of the population in only one year. The peace agreement provided for the creation of the National Rural Health Plan, whose three main objectives were to expand the availability of health care in rural areas, strengthen infrastructure and improve service delivery. A preliminary inventory of existing facilities was under way, and plans were being developed to build new facilities and establish telemedicine services.

31. The Government produced an annual monitoring report on the use of the *tutela* procedure. The procedure was a means of protecting fundamental rights and constituted an important tool in facilitating access to health care that was not covered by health insurance.

32. **Ms. Londoño Soto** (Colombia) said that after the suspension of the use of glyphosate for the eradication of illegal crops, the National Police had hired 160 civilian workers to perform the task manually; it planned to recruit a further 600 workers in October 2017. All personnel would receive training, health insurance and occupational accident

insurance, which would be a clear improvement on the situation in the previous reporting period. Moreover, areas deemed to present a risk of anti-personnel mines had been mapped in detail as part of the effort, supported by the international community, to clear mines from a swathe of Colombian territory. As a result of those measures, the number of accidents involving civilian workers had fallen significantly and the most serious reported incident had been a confrontation rather than a mine detonation.

33. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu** (Country Task Force), noting that the education budget had recently overtaken the defence and police budget, said that Colombia had made good progress in terms of respect for the right to education. Nevertheless, she was concerned about gaps in access and quality, which varied significantly between regions and social classes, while school infrastructure deficiencies persisted as a result of damage or destruction during the conflict. Other worrisome issues included the prevalence of child workers and risks to children's safety, considering that anti-personnel mines had been laid in most parts of the country, often near schools. Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur on the right to education had drawn attention to the indirect costs of education, which sometimes meant that families had to choose between eating and sending their children to school. She therefore wished to know what measures the Government had taken to deal with those concerns and to progressively achieve free education at all levels.

34. In the light of official statistics which suggested that in 2017 Colombia had 7.3 million internally displaced persons, of whom 40 per cent were children and young people under the age of 23, it seemed likely that the conflict had negatively affected children's ability to attend and remain in school. She therefore wondered whether the Government had identified the education of internally displaced persons as a priority and had adopted a plan of action and a budget to meet the educational needs of that group. If such a plan existed, what levels of education did it target, and how did it address the needs of different ethnic groups?

35. On the question of children with disabilities, the National Department of Statistics had reported that in 2012, a large proportion of children and adolescents with disabilities were not enrolled in any form of education. Non-governmental organizations had informed the Committee that in some cases, persons with disabilities had filed *tutela* petitions requesting the courts to protect their right to education. Furthermore, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities had expressed concern about the low enrolment of persons with disabilities at all levels of education, the lack of adapted classrooms within mainstream schools and the lack of teaching and reading materials in accessible formats and modes of communication. What steps would the Government take to ensure the right to inclusive education for children with disabilities, in accordance with the Covenant and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?

36. Given the lack of culturally appropriate education for indigenous and Afro-Colombian students and the high dropout rate among such students, she asked how the Government might improve access to culturally appropriate education and reduce dropout rates. She would also like to know whether the Government planned to rethink its ethno-education policy so as to ensure that State education promoted interaction and understanding among different ethnic groups. The Committee would also be grateful for more information on how the Government addressed the cultural diversity of Colombia in the school curriculum, particularly in history classes.

37. Concerning the right to take part in cultural life, she considered that the "do no harm" approach adopted by the State party was an important principle that took sensitivities and sources of tension between groups into account. However, given that land was used and valued differently by members of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, she wished to learn how the State party balanced different conceptions of land and ensured that the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous communities was obtained when deciding whether to permit mining and other activities. Information might also be provided on whether human rights impact assessments and other measures were carried out so that development programmes could be reconciled with access to ancestral lands and traditional ways of living.

38. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** said that in the light of improvements in access to primary and secondary education, he wished to know what policy the Government had adopted, and what outcomes had been achieved, in terms of access to and the quality of preschool education. While it had been acknowledged that the training of teachers was crucial for quality, he felt that teachers' salaries and the respect that they were accorded in society were also important factors. He therefore asked what policies were being implemented to improve the situation of teachers.

39. Considering that the latest version of the *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization indicated that 4 out of the 68 indigenous languages listed in the previous edition had become extinct, with a further dozen at risk of extinction, he asked how minority languages were recognized in education, both as a subject of study and as a language of instruction. Moreover, given that the Constitutional Court decisions of 2009, 2010 and 2013 recognized that 36 indigenous peoples, representing 1.4 million people, were at risk of physical and cultural extinction, and recommended the implementation of plans for the protection of those communities, he asked how many indigenous peoples enjoyed protection under those plans and whether the State party had the political will to uphold the plans as a State policy, regardless of changes in the political cycle and in the administration of justice.

40. Considering that the Constitutional Court had identified situations of discrimination affecting persons of African descent, he asked what regulations and policies were being implemented to guarantee the principle of non-discrimination for Afro-Colombians. Lastly, he asked why the percentage of women entering scientific professions was lower than in other Latin American countries and what policies were being implemented to encourage women to embark on scientific careers.

41. **Ms. Niño Fierro** (Colombia) said that 20 per cent of the persons registered in the Government's integrated enrolment system were recognized as forcibly displaced persons. The Government had implemented several initiatives to meet education needs in remote and rural areas, including a boarding schools programme, support and training for teachers and infrastructure improvements. The Ministry of Education had designed flexible education models for classes containing children of different ages and academic levels. The implementation of free education had helped improve coverage levels in recent years, although school abandonment had diminished only slightly and continued to pose a challenge. Measures put in place to encourage students to attend and remain in school included the provision of transport, a school feeding programme and door-to-door enquiries that actively sought out children who were not in school.

42. Three per cent of the persons registered in the integrated enrolment system were classified as belonging to indigenous communities. Different approaches had been adopted to provide education services to that population, including the direct recruitment of indigenous teachers and the contracting of various education services to authorized indigenous organizations. The Ministry of Education had engaged for three years with the National Council for Consultation with Indigenous Peoples, resulting in the recent agreement to create an indigenous education system.

43. The implementation of free education had resulted in the elimination of school fees and supplementary charges, while resources had been channelled to schools so that they could purchase furniture and materials, provide transport and issue certificates, thus reducing indirect costs for students and their families. The Ministry of Education financed the tests taken at the third, sixth and ninth grades, leaving only the eleventh-grade State tests that were financed by families.

44. The Government recognized the need to address the infrastructure deficit in the school system and aimed to significantly reduce the shortfall in the number of classrooms through an accelerated construction programme. It was hoped that infrastructure work would be completed in almost 1,500 schools by end of the current legislative session. The Government also planned to issue a call for proposals for infrastructure improvements in the municipalities identified as having priority in post-conflict development.

45. Efforts to improve the quality of education were beginning to bear fruit, although a gap between urban and rural schools remained. The score obtained by Colombian students

in the Programme for International Student Assessment had increased by five points, with improvements in mathematics, reading and science. The Ministry of Education had developed an index for the measurement of quality, which included factors such as the school environment and State test results. Underperforming schools, most of which were located in rural areas, were identified and supported through the "Learning for All" programme. Schools also set their own targets and measured progress internally.

46. Although educational institutions were independent and there was no single national curriculum, the Ministry of Education had worked to strengthen the curriculum by developing and promoting Basic Rights of Education, which applied to key areas of study such as mathematics and English. The Ministry had distributed new textbooks to all parts of the country.

47. The education level of teachers had gradually improved; in 2017, 40 per cent of teachers had a postgraduate qualification. Other improvements related to the functioning of selection processes and the implementation of classroom-based assessments of teachers, through which teachers could move up the salary scale. The Government was fulfilling its commitment to the teacher's union to progressively raise wages.

48. The Ministry had implemented different strategies to promote access to higher education for students from low-income backgrounds. Since 2015, it had implemented the *"Ser Pilo Paga"* programme, which had led to a significant increase in the enrolment of low-income students in accredited higher education institutions. Beneficiaries of the programme came from municipalities throughout Colombia and were much more likely to complete their studies. More than 45 sources of funding were available to students wishing to enrol in tertiary education; many of them were designed for students from certain population groups or with particular academic specializations. The Government also aimed to ensure access to education for displaced and vulnerable persons through its National Literacy Programme, which would benefit 220,000 young people and adults by the end of the legislative session.

49. The Government recognized the difficulties it faced in delivering education services for persons with disabilities, principally the lack of reliable statistics and the need to develop a regulatory framework. In that context, the Ministry of Education had held consultations with the National Institute of the Deaf and the National Institute for the Blind, leading to the recent entry into force of a decree setting forth a framework for assisting persons with disabilities. Implementation of that decree was under way and work was being carried out with local education authorities to determine the demand for services.

50. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu** said that, although the level of enrolment of internally displaced children in primary schools was only slightly lower than the national average, she remained concerned that the difference was much greater at the preschool level and in secondary and higher education. Were any specific measures envisaged to tackle that issue? She asked the delegation whether there was an official explanation for the high dropout rates among indigenous children between the ages of 12 and 17.

51. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** said that he would be interested to hear more about the costs of education. It was important to remember that, in line with the letter and the spirit of article 13 of the Covenant, secondary and higher education, as well as primary education, should be made accessible free of charge.

52. **Mr. Zerbini Ribeiro Leão** said that he wished to know if there were any policies in place to combat discrimination against LGBTI persons or persons of African descent.

53. **Ms. Niño Fierro** (Colombia) said that primary and secondary education were provided free of charge. The State recognized that vulnerable groups such as internally displaced persons were more likely to drop out of school, and it had taken steps to support them. Under the "More Families in Action" programme, for example, adults who were illiterate or had failed to complete their schooling received economic incentives to enter educational programmes. Incentives were also available to families that kept their children in school. The Ministry of Education was committed to combating discrimination against LGBTI persons. The matter had been addressed in local-level school socialization committees and, despite strong opposition from conservative elements in the country, the

Government had drafted a document containing anti-discrimination guidelines and designed a programme to help young people develop the relevant citizenship skills.

54. **Ms. Londoño Soto** (Colombia) said that the participation of women in fields such as engineering, science and technology remained low, but State-run universities and other institutes of higher education were seeking to address the issue.

55. **Ms. Alfaro Castillo** (Colombia) said that Colombia did not have a single cultural identity. There were 120 indigenous communities, a large population of persons of African descent and deep traditional divides between rural and urban society. Only recently had the country begun to consider its cultural and ethnic diversity as one of its greatest resources.

56. The Government was actively seeking to protect the linguistic and cultural heritage of indigenous peoples, to encourage their participation in the national cultural system and to revitalize and preserve their historical memory. Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero communities had also sought recognition of their specific heritage, and the Government was supporting the International Decade for People of African Descent as a way to protect their cultural identity as expressed in their own cultural and artistic activities. Thanks to an inclusive policy that recognized the educational systems of ethnic minorities themselves, the quality of education in those communities' educational establishments had improved.

57. A network of public libraries covered even the most deprived areas of the country, while mobile libraries visited many of the areas affected by the armed conflict. The authorities sought to use culture as a way to repair a social fabric that had been destroyed by years of violence and displacement. One emblematic example was the building of a community centre and a commemorative monument at the site of an infamous massacre in the town of Maria La Baja. On a different front, efforts were being made to promote the manufacture of traditional indigenous cultural products and insert them into the national economy. Important national documents, such as the peace agreement and court judgments restoring territorial rights, were being made available in all the country's many national languages.

58. **Ms. Londoño Soto** (Colombia) said that Colombia had launched a programme to protect biodiversity in the context of sustainable development. The programme made provision for expeditions to catalogue animal and plant species in some of the more remote areas of the country about which little was known, in part because they had been affected by the armed conflict. One such expedition, which had taken place in 2016 in the Department of Caquetá, had involved the participation of local indigenous and rural populations.

59. Regrettably, a total of 178,600 hectares of territory had been deforested in Colombia in the course of 2016, a considerable increase with respect to 2015. Nonetheless, the Government had drafted a plan to minimize further deforestation and to encourage reforestation with both native and non-native species. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, the National Development Plan 2014-2018 made provision for the increased use of renewable energy sources, particularly in areas with large concentrations of indigenous people and persons of African descent. The authorities had recently issued new regulations aimed at encouraging energy efficiency, especially among more disadvantaged groups. The efforts Colombia was making in that regard had been recognized by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

60. **Ms. Romero Cristancho** (Colombia) said that important progress had been made in protecting the rights of LGBTI persons in Colombia. Same-sex marriage had been legalized and same-sex couples had the same adoption and inheritance rights as the general population. Action had been taken towards recognizing transgender identity, and citizens could change their identity documents to reflect their chosen gender. Anti-discrimination legislation had been passed and sexual reassignment surgery was available in the country's medical institutions. Moreover, the authorities had embraced a policy of inclusive education that promoted respect for LGBTI persons.

61. Nonetheless, challenges persisted. Underlying cultural attitudes could lead to discrimination and violence against the LGBTI community, and the authorities had

launched a number of initiatives to combat that phenomenon. Law enforcement officials received specialized training in how to investigate and prosecute offences committed against LGBTI persons. The Ministry of the Interior was currently gathering data concerning the human rights situation of LGBTI persons in the country, for use in guiding public policy and government action in 2018 and 2019. At the same time, the Presidential Advisory Office for Human Rights was seeking to facilitate access to justice for LGBTI persons who were victims of the armed conflict. Its efforts were directed not just to seeking reparations but also to highlighting the particular impact the armed conflict had had on LGBTI persons as a category.

62. **Ms. Gaviria** (Colombia) said that the Ministry of Labour had developed a training strategy to make persons of African descent in Colombia better aware of their rights and to help them to find employment. A programme specifically directed at Afro-Colombian victims of the armed conflict in the Pacific region had helped more than 3,000 people. The Ministry had also held consultations with a representative group of persons of African descent in order to understand their needs, make them aware of the instructional support mechanisms available and work together to develop concrete plans.

63. **Ms. Romero Cristancho** (Colombia) said that the Ministry of the Interior had set up the Observatory on Discrimination and Racism with a view to formulating more focused policies in that area. The Observatory provided advice and support to victims of discrimination and racism, and forwarded their complaints to the competent authorities. Public campaigns and online courses had been organized to call on citizens to reject racism and to recognize and embrace Afro-Colombian culture.

64. **Mr. Zerbini Ribeiro Leão** said that the Committee appreciated the open and frank dialogue with the Colombian delegation, which had provided very pertinent replies to the Committee's questions.

65. **Ms. Londoño Soto** (Colombia) said that the questions raised by the Committee had revealed the members' profound knowledge of the situation in Colombia, both nationally and at the local level. The outcome of the dialogue would help the authorities to examine their own actions in a more critical light, to appreciate what had been achieved and to see how much remained to be done. More efforts were needed, for example, to bring national development into line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. If required, the Government was ready to report back periodically on the progress it had made and the obstacles it faced in the areas of particular concern to the Committee. She also wished to acknowledge the efforts made by civil society organizations and their role in spurring the Government to action.

66. The peace agreement must be converted into reality for all Colombians, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. The dialogue with the Committee had highlighted the fact that the hoped-for transformation could not be achieved without a rights-based approach involving the participation of all communities in Colombia.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.